

Former Pastor Jack Schaap Blames Affair With Teen on Personal Problems

The former pastor at a megachurch in Indiana has blamed his sexual relationship with a 16-year-old parishioner on personal problems, including stress, health issues and financial woes.

Jack Schaap, 54, led the congregation of 15,000 at First Baptist Church in Hammond, Ind. for 11 years. The married father of two was let go in July 2012 after a deacon saw a text message on his phone from the teenager, reportedly of the two of them kissing.

Schaap pleaded guilty in September 2012 in a U.S. District Court to transporting a minor across state lines for sexual relations. In a new court filing, he requested that he be given the minimum 10-year sentence and blamed the affair on stress and depression.

A sentencing memorandum filed by the pastor's attorney, Paul Stracci, said Schaap was under great stress, exhausted and depressed at the time of the relationship.

"Unfortunately, for a four-week period during the summer of 2012, he acted in a manner contrary to the entire balance of his life by engaging in sexual activity with a young woman with whom he had only recently come to counsel," Stracci wrote in the memorandum, according to The Associated Press.

The memorandum also said Schaap was regularly working 100-hour weeks as he struggled to raise money for the church, handled additional counseling responsibilities and had to lay off staff. The megachurch pastor was also being treated for chronic and acute inflammation of his prostate.

All of these circumstances led to his “aberrant” behavior with the girl who turned 17 during their affair. Schaap reportedly met the girl while counseling students at First Baptist’s schools.

The pastor admitted to adultery and “improper behavior,” and said while pleading guilty in September that his actions were “sinful and wrong.”

The relationship with the girl, who turned 17 one week after the start, lasted from June 1 to July 30. The *Chicago Tribune* reported that Schaap took the girl from Indiana to Illinois and to Michigan “with the intent that she engage in sexual activity,” according to criminal information.

“While serving as the pastor of First Baptist Church, Dr. Schaap committed his entire life to the service of his local community as well as to the world at large,” said the new court filing, which includes 140 letters of support from Schaap’s family and church members, and will be considered with his sentencing.

“We were known for our happy marriage, and it was not a hypocrisy; it was real,” his wife, Cindy Schaap, wrote in a letter.

“His preaching has helped me to understand a lot about my behavior and has been a great tool in the healing of my marriage and relationship with my children,” church member Paul Collins wrote in another letter.

U.S. District Judge Rudy Lozano scheduled the sentencing for Jan. 15. However, partly due to the size of the filing and the time needed to respond to it, Assistant U.S. Attorney Jill Rochelle Koster has asked the judge for a 45-day continuance.